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Dreaming Against a Backdrop

Jesse Lee Kercheval

There are no pictures
of our parents' wedding,
so imagine one instead,
a restaging of the day
with scenery. See,
the kitchen floor painted
green becomes a garden
where the reception has begun.
Here's our mother's Brownie;
take a snapshot
and put it in an album.
Father in his uniform,
Mother in her blue suit,
on her hand a wedding band,
the one that I wear now,
trying to bring luck
to such a luckless thing.

Look closely, sister,
and you'll see
you are already in the picture,
in our mother's belly
underneath her skirt.
Now look very very closely,
and you'll see that I am too.
You are dreaming
and you are dreaming me.
In your baby alphabet,
all fruits and pets,
A for Apple, B for Bunny,
S is already
for your only sister.

Out on the lawn,
they served cupcakes
and ice cream, that bee's joy,
all leading to such sorrow.
Already, it's too late
for us to stop the wedding,
but what if we refuse
to take our cue and come along?
Refuse to turn the pages
in the album that lead
to you, then me?
I lean into the photograph
and rescue you, my peach.
Our bullet heads
will not be squeezed
from anybody's body.

Our parents will have
to be themselves and nothing of us,
have to live
a life of highballs,
tipsy dinners on TV trays.
A cat. At most, a dog
to keep them company.

We will stay out late,
dipping like swallows
in the night air above the garden,
turn on a red geranium,
when it's too dark to see.
And when our parents die,
as they do, badly and too soon,
we will not know them
and so will not have to mourn
for them, cry for them,
and miss them every day.
There will only be
the two of us, *no birthdays,*
every day a party,
floating, ageless in the sky.